

From: Murali Balaji [mailto:murali@hafsitem.org]
Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2015 11:15 AM
To: HSSframework
Cc: Suhag Shukla; Samir Kalra
Subject: Letter from academics regarding frameworks draft narrative

Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education

To the Honorable Commission members:

Attached is a letter drafted by noted religion scholars regarding the frameworks draft narrative. We hope you will consider their academic perspective and expertise during the next steps of the frameworks narrative revision.

Thank you in advance,

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April 21, 2015

Thomas Adams, Executive Director
Instructional Quality Commission
Curriculum Frameworks and Instructional Resources Division (CFIRD)
California Department of Education
1430 N Street, Room 3207
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Dr. Adams and members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

We are writing this letter to recommend the Commission make necessary changes to the 6th and 7th grade history draft narratives as they relate to India and Hinduism, in order to not only ensure academic accuracy, but parity in covering world religions across the state's history-social science frameworks.

The current 6th grade narrative as it relates to ancient India contains inaccuracies and does not depict Hinduism as a living tradition. Lines 559-563, which describe early Hinduism, focus on the disputed Aryan migration theory, and that there was a system of beliefs called Brahmanism, referred to in line 570. The term Brahmanism is highly problematic because most scholars don't refer to it as such, and is unnecessary given that the subject of study in this standard is Hinduism. Therefore, it is better referred to as early Hinduism.

Another issue is how caste is described. The frameworks lines 583-90 state: "The main social categories, known as varnas, were priests; warriors; farmers, artisans, and merchants; dependent laborers; and, by 500 CE or earlier, dalits, or 'untouchables.' This class system became distinctive over the centuries for being especially complex and formal, involving numerous prohibitions that kept groups ritually separated from one another. Because these divisions became particularly rigid, scholars have classified this hierarchy as a caste system."

The caste system, as currently constituted, did not develop until well into the common era, which does not align with the narrative on ancient India. More importantly, this narrative does not distinguish between the idea of varna and the occupational categories, or jatis, that existed in ancient Indian society. Varna refers to the four types of work mentioned in the current chapter and described as 'caste'; but there is evidence that suggests that varna was not always hereditary. Jati, on the other hand, refers to a more specific, and hereditary, occupational status that was conflated with varna at a later point in Indian history than that under consideration in this chapter. Moreover, the category of untouchability was only added around 1000 CE. This social complexity is completely lost in the text as currently worded. It also ignores the social mobility that scholars agree existed during that period - centuries before the idea of caste took root. Further, "dalit" is a 19th century term with political overtones that would require too much explanation for a middle school textbook. Consequently, that term does not properly belong in this discussion.

Finally, it is deeply problematic that the 7th grade draft narrative does not mention the Bhakti movement in India, particularly in lines 1691-1695, in which the Sikhs are depicted. In fact, the Bhakti movement in Hinduism arose at the same time as the Sikh movement and Sufi Islam in the Indian subcontinent. The current narrative does not reflect the dynamic changes and syncretism that were taking place across the Indian subcontinent during that time.

Having a final curriculum narrative without mentioning both the Bhakti and Sufi movements would be inaccurate and not provide students and teachers the proper context about that period and the dynamic changes that were taking place across the Indian subcontinent during that time.

We urge you to consider making changes that reflect vetted scholarship and takes into consideration the voices of diverse communities across the state.

Respectfully submitted,

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